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ABSTRACT

The original requirement for evaluation in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was unprecedented. However, the wording and intent of the requirement was purposely left vague because of the conflict between the schoolman's concern over federal interference and Congress' demands for feedback that could lead to efficient spending of the funds. Evaluation can be a useful management tool for the practitioner of Title I because it explains whether objectives are actually being met and because it gives needed data on whether to continue, modify, or terminate a project. Such considerations must be balanced with educators' tendencies to maintain the status quo. Some recommended characteristics of evaluation reports should be: accentuate the positive in reporting results; use of layman's language, especially in a summary section; reevaluate essentials every year and nonessentials sporadically; be sure that each evaluation reports on some common strand of effectiveness, such as pupil achievement in reading and mathematics; and use longitudinal studies for information purposes only, not to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Title I. Finally, the evaluation should not be able to determine which services any child is to receive. (Author/RC)

A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW:

EVALUATING THE EVALUATION OF ESEA TITLE I

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Historical Perspective

The expenditure of the funds authorized by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 has now proceeded for a decade. The authorizing legislation for these expenditures was unique in the history of education in our nation. Never before had Congress authorized such large sums for elementary and secondary education; never before had anyone authorized billions of dollars for the education of the poor; never before had such restrictions been placed on the expenditure of funds for education by the federal government.

Some members of Congress had grave reservations about allowing educators any type of discretion in spending funds for the poor. Some felt that education of the poor was a low priority among many educators and that they would divert the funds to other uses. Robert Kennedy, probably more than anyone else, wanted to assure that such massive funds were in fact used to develop special and successful programs for the disadvantaged. As a result, he demanded some type of feedback which would provide both legislators and parents with the information they needed to assure that Title I dollars were being used to help poor children. Mr. Kennedy felt that the reports produced would lead to improved local management practices and to better opportunities for efficient federal direction to education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 represented the first major piece of federal legislation concerning education that mandated evaluation. The evaluation requirement of this act was unprecedented. The funds

were designed to meet the special educational needs of educationally disadvantaged children, and it was felt that the evaluation requirements would provide up-to-date information about the outcomes of Title I efforts with the expectation that local districts could adjust and reform their practices in educating poor children. In addition, it was expected that the resulting influx of well-organized information would lead to efficient federal management of education programs. The key concept was that the availability of evaluation reports would lead to change and reform in current practices. Such was the dream!

But from the beginning the hopes for evaluation ran into opposition. Both local and state educators feared federal interference in what was considered a State right. They were apprehensive that it would allow comparisons between local school districts that were unequal in the resources already available to them. They reasoned that evaluation practices would be costly and that the measures to be used, especially achievement scores, were inappropriate in that they measured only one aspect of the learning situation. As a result of the conflict between the schoolmen's concerns and Robert Kennedy's demands, the wording and the intent of the requirement for evaluation was purposely left vague when ESEA was finally written.

The national evaluations that have resulted have failed to meet the expectations of the early theorists and have, to a great degree on the national scene, failed to measure up to the needs of federal program officials. Both USOE officials and national evaluators have been unable for the past decade to produce evaluations that are indicative of the progress or lack of it that has been made by educationally disadvantaged pupils as a result of

the expenditure of ESEA Title I funds.

Evaluation At The Local Level

ESEA Title I as it was originally conceived and as it continues to operate today has its operational authority and base in the thousands of local educational agencies of our nation. Needs assessments are done locally, programs are formulated locally, and it follows that evaluation designs are locally devised and executed. It is this situs at the local level which has been one of the main reasons for the failure of national efforts to evaluate the over-all effect of Title I. However, even at the local level there have been certain problems.

Originally, local districts had no incentives to collect or report data; and officials at the federal level had difficulty in mandating that it be done. In addition, local districts tended to be defensive about their achievement scores and about the long-term effects of Title I projects on pupils. Educational policy-makers displayed a basic resistance to any type of assessment and showed indifference and disinterest in any evaluations that were done. Finally, local districts each set up different goals and objectives and different treatments, and it became difficult to prescribe all-encompassing objectives and strategies that were capable of precise measurement. In spite of these restrictions and problems many local districts made and continue to make honest efforts to evaluate Title I projects in their school districts.

The Needs Of The Present

However, the fact remains that legislators, educators, and the community at large want to know what has been done with fifteen billion dollars in the

last decade. It is indefensible to allow billions of dollars to disappear into the nation's educational system without a trace. It is the responsibility of the evaluation community of offer answers as to what has been done with these funds over the years and to develop systems that can coordinate the myriad of results that Title I funds have produced. It is a concurrent responsibility of local federal program directors to understand the necessity for some type of consistency in evaluation and cooperate in its development. Evaluation as a process continues to grow in importance as more and more attention must be directed at assessing and improving results.

My practical experience with the evaluation of ESEA Title I has been in the Cleveland Public School system. I have become convinced that over the years evaluation of Title I in Cleveland has shown marked improvement and has become sophisticated to the point where the annual reports represent superior work. The comments and recommendations which follow are based on various aspects of the evaluations which I receive annually. Practically all these items are already an integral part of Cleveland's evaluation reports of Title I.

Evaluation As A Management Tool

My own views and perspectives of evaluation have changed in the nine years that I have worked with ESEA Title I and with other special compensatory funds. Originally, evaluation merely gave feedback on whether particular programs at the local level were being implemented as designed and whether they were effective in terms of the reasons for which they were initiated. However, as time progressed evaluation came to serve a

a variety of functions and became a useful management tool.

First of all, evaluation allowed me to ascertain whether the various objectives of the project were being met. The viewpoint of a person outside the formal operation of the project was given as to whether the process was proceeding as originally conceived and whether this process led to predicted changes in the pupils served. Secondly, evaluation gave me results which could be used to justify either the continuation, the termination, or the redesign of particular projects. Where pupils achieved the objectives of the project, especially in terms of achievement objectives which had been set and in terms of the academic areas of reading and mathematics which continue to be high priority areas of school systems, evaluation results could be used to prove the efficacy of the project and justify its continuation. Where the results did not demonstrate successful accomplishment of objectives, either retooling or discontinuation of the project could be demanded through the use of objective evidence. Many of the original Title I projects in Cleveland have been discontinued or modified because of the evaluations which were done. Some have been shifted to other funding sources after modification.

This usage of evaluation just described has followed some very specific procedures and guidelines in the Cleveland system. When a project is initially written, it is oftentimes done by persons who are not the eventual implementors of the project. It may be that the objectives and procedures are found to be inappropos once the project is initiated. The evaluation will usually indicate a non-attainment of certain objectives. I have found it best

at this point to allow the operational people to formulate the objectives of the project for the second year of operation. In this way they can bear more responsibility for the attainment of the objectives, and not be able to state that the main reason for the failure to meet objectives was their inappropriateness to the actual setting in the first place.

Therefore, the first evaluation becomes a monitoring device to ascertain whether the project is on course. Even though much can be said about the changes that occur in pupils, I do not put too much weight on such findings after only a year of operation. I usually turn to the second year and its evaulation as the proof of the pudding. If the findings do not indicate attainment of the objectives that have been revised by the project people, it is at this point that I begin to question the viability of the project. At this point I can demand retooling. If future evaluations after the second year do not indicate attainment of project objectives, I then have outside objective evidence to discontinue either certain activities or the project itself.

In the case which I have just described, evaluation is used as a management tool to assist decision-making and to reallocate resources when results indicate that objectives are not being met.

But things do not always work out in such a utopian way. It is a fallacy to assume that if the truth is known it will be acted upon. Inherent conservatism and a need to maintain the status quo are often more important than the results of an objective analysis that shows a need for an alternative course of action. Educators reject rapid change that upsets the status quo despite its educational value. Evaluation is too often not used by those

for whom it is intended because its results challenge current practice. Evaluation must therefore balance the need to maintain the status quo with the need for change or reform.

Accentuate Something Positive

As a user of these evaluation results, I would like to make certain observations and recommendations concerning the evaluation of Title I as I have seen it and as I would like to see it.

When I was engaged in classroom teaching, I remember one of the principals continuously reminding us to "say something good about the child" whenever we talked to parents or wrote comments on report cards. This was sound advice then and it is sound advice for evaluators of today's projects. Evaluation that is in some way supportive of school system policy is usually considered successful. I have to believe that people who work in special projects do want to see the project succeed. For this they should see something stated positively about what they have done, even if the over-all objectives of the project are not met. Of all the national studies of ESEA Title I that have been done in the past decade, the ones which received the most publicity were the American Institute of Research (AIR) studies; their series was entitled "It Works" and concentrated on a few successful compensatory projects. They did not publish or challenge what did not work, although many knew that hundreds of projects were rejected because they did not meet the stringent criteria needed for inclusion in the final report.

It may very well be that legislators seem more concerned about the distribution of Title I funds than they are about the effects of the funding,

but it must be remembered that Congress wants to be seen as wise and judicious and wants to see the success of its initiatives toward Title I. Congressmen welcome reports of successful Title I programs in their states or district; they want to hear success stories. However, they have not had too many success stories to tell. I am convinced that Title I has done some good but that we have not done enough to accentuate the positive. As a result, it has become more commonplace to say that "Title I is not working."

Need For Consistency In Reporting Results

Some of the data which is collected should be able to meet both local and national needs for information concerning the results of Title I. There is a need for such consistency so that unified statements about the effects of Title I can be made. By such methods input can be made to Congress. In identifying what kinds of data should be collected in order to wed the needs of local evaluation and the needs of Congress we must also consider what is most defensible and most easily understood.

A common strand of effectiveness should be included in each and every evaluation of a Title I project. Educators differ as to what constitutes a successful Title I project, but it gets down to a child's achieving some proficiency in basic skills that he did not have previously. At present, there are no uniformly accepted criteria for determining what constitutes a successful program, although NCE's (normal curve equivalents) are now being proposed.

The recent GAO report on ESEA Title I indicated that the Office of Education has not required adequate information from states and local school

districts for measuring the national impact of Title I projects on improving the achievement of pupils. The GAO investigation found that local evaluations, which are the basis of state evaluations to USOE, generally lack uniform data and have often been incomplete.

From my experience, even local information seekers continue to request data in terms of the achievement made by pupils in the basic skills of reading and mathematics. Therefore, such data should be included in any reports made about Title I. I propose that achievement results in basic skills be the common strand throughout evaluation reports. Other data needed concerning pupil characteristics or the attitudes of both pupils and parents can be made as a supplement to this common data concerning reading and mathematics gains. Evaluations that neglect to include data concerning academic achievement usually fail to give federal program directors the kind of concrete data they need to defend Title I expenditures to a highly critical questioner.

As mentioned previously, program directors fear threatening evaluations. They do want to improve programs or even replace them, but because of local pressures to continue certain entrenched programs, they want to be able to save face in doing so. In this same vein, there is also the fear that persons in the community will use any negative evaluation to attack the schools. Therefore, information which is not congruent with the self-interests of the system has a good chance of being ignored or suppressed.

Layman's Language

Evaluators should continuously bear in mind that one of the responsibilities imposed on school systems is dissemination of information about the operation of

Title I. Since the evaluation report itself is a major vehicle used in dissemination, the information should be presented in ways that are simple for the interested party to read and comprehend. The language of the narrative should be in layman's language; it should also be comprehensible to parents who in their advisory committee roles have become a party to the operation of Title I. It would seem that the best way to accomplish this would be to have the evaluation divided into both a technical section and a summary section. The technical section could be for those persons who want in-depth information; the summary section could be written in non-technical language and could serve the purpose of either the parent or the person who is looking for a general overview of the results.

One of the original hopes of ESEA Title I was that promising practices would be expanded and replicated elsewhere. However, it has now become evident that a multiplicity of influences govern local district policy, and success in one place does not necessarily guarantee success in another place. It must be understood that dissemination of information about successful practices does not lead to their adoption elsewhere or even to their expansion in the same district. Nevertheless, such a consideration should not preclude the local district having a formal system for disseminating information about its exemplary activities to all those concerned.

Frequency of Evaluations

Another problem that I see is the viewpoint that particular activities must be evaluated each and every year; much time and effort seems to be duplicated every year in preparing a new evaluation report. As one reads

the evaluations of a project in successive years, there seems to be much duplication from one year to the next. Perhaps it would be possible to evaluate objectives concerning gains in academic achievement each year, and do some of the supplementary items only every few years. The AIR studies did show that there are inconsistencies from year to year in a particular project, but I have not found significant enough differences to warrant a thorough evaluation of all aspects of a project every year. The one thing that I have found to be the single most important factor in making a project successful is people. I can always remember someone who said that there is magic in people and not in things. As long as the staff of a project remains essentially the same from one year to another, as long as at least two successive evaluations have shown positive results, and as long as the objectives and procedures of a project remain the same, I do not see how the evaluation would change too much in a year's time. As a result, annual extensive evaluations of every aspect of a project would seem unnecessary.

Longitudinal Studies

Some evaluations contain a section on some type of longitudinal study that has been done on some past participants in Title I projects. I feel that many of these studies are not well-founded, are misunderstood, and as a result should probably not be included in evaluation reports. Let me hasten to add that I am well-aware that the latest GAO report on the operation of Title I in certain selected states found longitudinal studies on former Title I pupils to be seriously lacking. I would favor such longitudinal studies only on the condition that they are information seeking and are not

used to evaluate the over-all effectiveness of Title I. The premise of such studies would have to be that once a pupil has been treated in a Title I project he should be able to be placed back into the mainstream and proceed as a normal child without further problems. Such a phenomenon is not expected of the medical profession, and I do not feel that such a procedure should be expected of the education profession. When a patient goes to a physician with a strep throat and is given a prescription that clears up the malady, it is not expected that the strep throat will not reoccur several months later or next year. Likewise, when a child with a reading deficiency goes to a remedial reading teacher and receives prescriptive treatment, it should not be expected that the problem will not reoccur in the future once the special treatment is stopped. The author realizes that one situation involves a physical condition whereas the second situation involves an intellectual condition, and that the comparison may be considered too simplistic. Too often longitudinal studies are done with the hope that Title I services to a pupil will cure his malady forever.

I firmly believe that such a child would have to receive continuing support if he is to progress at a normal rate. Title I service is designed to allow the child to close the gap; it is not aimed at changing his whole learning pattern.

Usually the results of such longitudinal studies are negative, and conclusions are reached that the treatment was not so good after all. I personally feel that the GAO was incorrect in looking for longitudinal results on individual pupils and not differentiating between closing the gap and

changing a learning pattern. Besides, expenditure of Title I funds on longitudinal studies of pupils no longer in a Title I project would be a questionable Title I expense since these pupils are no longer eligible for Title I services or expenditures.

Tail Wagging The Dog?

Last of all, I feel that we must be careful to assure that evaluation does not become the proverbial tail that wags the dog. Many times I have found that a particular operational procedure is questionable because it may contaminate the evaluation or lead to a situation where a pupil will receive two treatments with the result that the evaluation will not be able to distinguish what effect either treatment had on the results. As a person who is responsible for assuring that pupils receive needed services, I feel that the pupil must be given every opportunity to obtain all such services, even as the expense of other things such as evaluation. Conflicts can arise over such items as late entry into a project, exclusion of a child from services so that he may serve as part of a control group, or receipt of more than one treatment. I would recommend that when a conflict arises between service to a child and evaluating procedures, that particular child be excluded from the evaluation for that project. If necessary, the progress of such children can be included in a separate section or in a grand composite for the project. Evaluation should not be allowed to be the main reason why a particular service is given or not given to a child.

In conclusion, I make a plea for unity. We must continue to emphasize that making progress in the teaching of the basic skills of reading and

mathematics is the responsibility of everyone associated with the operation of ESEA Title I. Every staff member, whether an evaluator or a member of the service staff, should direct his efforts in this direction. Everyone should cooperate in "rowing the canoe in the same direction," i.e., in the direction of improved instructional services for pupils.